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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the efforts at Gardner-Webb University in North Carolina to extend the writing efforts of a writing across the curriculum (WAC) retreat into a greater matrix of scholarly activity, not only in the classroom but outside as well. Noting that the initial idea was that an intensive year of emphasizing scholastic activity could raise the level of scholarly awareness and build an understanding of its range beyond the conventional classroom throughout the University, the paper states that the title "Year of the Scholar" emerged, and WAC faculty reached agreement to present the concept to others on campus. According to the paper, the administration offered both moral and financial support, and allowed the faculty to develop their own ideas. The paper explains that some projects, such as the undergraduate journal, "The Gardner-Webb Review," and the annual Scholarship Showcase and Colloquium highlight student writing, while other activities focus on offering accessible models of scholarly discourse to students in expanded contexts. It lists some of these activities, such as a scholarly lecturer series, a film festival featuring award-winning films, a lunch time discussion with scholars, a freshman essay contest, and multicultural evenings, and it discusses these activities in the context of modeling writing across the curriculum. The paper finds that the "Year of the Scholar" programs and activities support their organizers' ideals in moving toward a goal of intellectualizing the totality of the University experience. (NKA)

# Writing through Modeling: Using Various Scholarship Enhancement Programs and Activities to Build Writing Interest and Skill.

by Les M. Brown

Paper presented at the National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference  
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## Writing through Modeling: Using Various Scholarship Enhancement Programs and Activities to Build Writing Interest and Skill

We have all experienced concern that many undergraduates come to a college or university with little understanding of scholarly pursuit. Their lives have been steeped in interests of childhood, adolescence and struggles with social maturity. Many of the students at Gardner-Webb University are the first generation in their families to attend college, their experiences in formal learning are limited to the classrooms of elementary and high school. Geographically, our institution offers students a congenial and personable learning environment, but one which is relatively isolated from the centers of scholarly and intellectual activity in North Carolina. The efforts of Dr. Gayle Price and the Writing Across The Curriculum (WAC) Retreat have offered us, as faculty, not only a forum for developing methods of improving writing and writing to learn in our various disciplines, but just as importantly, have served as a forum in which we can discuss a breadth of topics related to students' scholarship and methods of building awareness of scholarly pursuit.

In the wrap-up discussion following the WAC retreat six years ago, a consensus emerged among the participants that we may be able to extend the writing efforts into a greater matrix of scholarly activity, not only in the classroom but outside as well. The initial idea was that an intensive year of emphasizing scholastic activity could raise the level of scholarly awareness and build an understanding of its range beyond the conventional classroom throughout the university. The title *Year Of The Scholar* emerged, and we reached agreement that we should present the concept to others on campus.

With the support of senior administrators and the efforts of other faculty members, we

established a steering committee and sub-committees for implementation of various programs and activities. The administration offered both moral and financial support, and allowed us the freedom to develop our own ideas. Both faculty and students developed and assumed leadership roles in the various projects and activities, including and beyond those from the WAC retreat. Some projects, such as the undergraduate journal, *The Gardner-Webb Review*, and the annual Scholarship Showcase and Colloquium, highlight student writing. Other activities focus primarily on offering accessible models of scholarly discourse to students in expanded contexts. Some such activities which evolved include:

A scholarly lecturer series

A film festival featuring award-winning films or films of critical acclaim

The establishment of a 100 books list distinctive for our university

A lunch time discussion with scholars

A freshman essay contest

The *Now you Know* essay series and

Multi-cultural evenings

One of our programs serving as an effective tool for modeling writing across the curriculum is the Scholarly Lecturer Series. Often our students have little awareness of the scholarly activity undertaken by the faculty of their own university. The lecture series provides for student and public audiences the types of faculty scholarship normally presented only at professional conferences or published in academic journals. Each formal event is followed by a reception where students are encouraged to meet and talk with the speaker. The lecture series also focuses on visiting scholars whose publications and presentations serve as models. While

some faculty members encourage attendance and develop writing assignments from the lectures, the major emphasis is exposure of the university community to scholars who have demonstrated the value of writing excellence, audience awareness and substance. The speakers are usually introduced by the Academic Dean, thus highlighting their credentials and the importance of scholarly accomplishments. As examples of the lectures Dr. Donna Ellington of our Department of Social Sciences presented “Virginal Body, Virginal Soul: Understanding Mary in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries” based on research leading to her book recently published by Catholic University Press. Dr. David Parker of the English Department presented “The Commonplace Book in Tudor London”. John Shelton Reed, well known southern historian and co-editor of *Southern Cultures* gave a lecture entitled, “What’s Southern about the South.” As an example of dual modeling, the English Department required all first year students to read Robert Morgan’s *Gap Creek*. Morgan then presented one of our formal lectures on the writing of his award-winning novel. He made other presentations and visited English classes while on campus. An interdisciplinary faculty committee selects the speakers from proposals and nominations, carefully considering diversity of disciplines in the process. One of our faculty volunteers has recently completed on-line publication of the first lectures, which will enhance their use in the formal learning environment. As time permits, our library director distributes via e-mail a follow-up reading list of library holdings on the lecture subjects. The lecture series models multiple facets of scholarly discourse and communication, including research and argumentative writing, oral presentation and academic discussion skills.

Similar modeling is demonstrated through the Gardner-Webb University Film Festival, which offers exposure to film as an art form. Again it is important to note that our campus is

located in a region where students, even if they wish, have limited access to the more “art” driven theaters. The films are selected by a faculty committee, and volunteer faculty members prepare introductions which help the audience in appreciation and analysis. In the parallel course that emerged from the film festival students, use the modeling in their own journaling and analytical writing about the films shown. Post-film discussions occur informally, and students write commentaries regarding their “readings” of the film. Again, the films and their accompanying faculty presentations and discussions serve as excellent models for scholarly activities and build scholarly motivation toward excellence in writing. Dr. Gil Blackburn, our Vice President for Academic Affairs and published author on World War II Germany, led the discussion of *Das Boot*. One English professor who teaches Shakespeare presented the background lecture on *Elizabeth*. Faculty members led other discussions on films such as *Dr. Strangelove*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Lawn Dogs*, *The Piano*, *Europa Europa*, *Shall we Dance*, *Matewan*, and *Ed Wood*.

The annual Scholarship Showcase also includes faculty and student scholarly poster sessions concurrent with student presentations. The modeling of faculty work in an informal setting through posters and displays exposes students to scholarly material produced by their own professors, and emphasizes the importance of scholarly pursuit as a life-long part of education. The faculty sessions usually emerge from ongoing research leading to publication or presentation at professional meetings. For example, I presented a poster display of research, later published in *Appalachian Journal*, on the loss of an African American Community during the African American outmigration from the North Carolina mountains during the middle of the last century.

Modeling also occurs in the Lunch with Scholars programs. Students sit with faculty volunteers at lunch in an informal setting discussing current issues. This activity offers students

opportunities to hear opposing viewpoints and participate in exchange of ideas with faculty. They learn that argumentation is a vital skill in the intellectual world and that understanding the subject is essential. Sometimes student writing arises from the discussions, but modeling is the primary benefit. Two examples illustrate the diversity of topics and faculty involvement. One of our history professors from Russia and a Nigerian professor in our school of business held one of the lunch sessions on the topic “The Current Political Climate in Russia.” “Sex, Ethics and Evolution: The Evolutionary Psychology and the Origins of Morality” was a topic of discussion led by members of our biology, psychology and business departments.

A colleague in the department of natural sciences, Tom English, is responsible for generating the *Now You Know* essay series, an excellent source of modeling of scholarship and writing, not only for the students but for the greater community. These essays, written by Gardner-Webb faculty and administrators, ran weekly in the local newspaper, are being published in booklet form, and are on line at the Gardner-Webb University home page (<http://www.gardner-webb.edu>); thus the essays, covering little known ideas and accomplishments that changed the world, will serve as accessible models for students and the community. The essays reflect the diversity and range of interests of the faculty through subjects ranging from “The Garden Cemetery Movement” to “The Discovery of Helium” and “The Origin of Department Stores.” Over thirty of the essays were produced and published within one year.

Faculty-led discussions of works from the 100 books list expose students to worthy works and emphasize not only excellence in reading but excellence in writing and oral communication. Members of the university community volunteer to lead the discussion of a book on the list. The bookstore manager orders copies of the text well in advance, and those interested read the book

in preparation for the discussion. All members of the university community are invited to attend.

One of our students developed the cultural evenings program. Volunteer faculty introduce students to the literature of a culture in which they have some expertise: they also include music and gather examples of the art and material of the culture as well. Students participate by discussing, and even dancing and singing at some of the events. The presentations serve as models of multi-cultural awareness. The events also serve as models that take participants beyond the traditional Euro-American experience, which is the predominant culture of our institution, and may also focus on diversity within the Euro-American culture as well. In recognition of our increasing Latino population, our Spanish professor developed an evening of Caribbean culture. We also developed an Appalachian evening that modeled Appalachian heritage beyond the "hillbilly" stereotype.

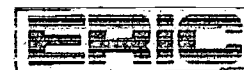
Anyone undertaking an idealistic concept of this dimension will experience occasional problems, as did we. However, we who gave birth to the *Year Of The Scholar* concept are proud of the accomplishments and evolution of the programs even as we attempt to fuse our ideals with practical logistics. Many who continue to be involved in the programs have attended Dr. Gayle Price's WAC retreat at Wildacres, North Carolina, and have been inspired by her ability to stir our desire to promote excellence, not only in writing but in breadth of scholarship. In attempting to focus our efforts on modeling for our students, we too have benefited as models for one another and have expanded our own desire for continuing scholarly pursuit. The *Year Of The Scholar* programs and activities have expanded the pedagogical environment of scholarship, and the modeling of scholarship into contexts beyond the traditional classroom environment. They support our ideals in moving us toward a goal of intellectualizing the totality of the university



experience.



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